

Thijs Porck, “[Two Notes on an Old English Confessional Prayer in Vespasian D. XX](#)”, *Notes and Queries* n.s. 60 (2013), 493–498

This is the post-print version, with page numbers of publisher's version added between angle brackets to facilitate referencing.

<493>

TWO NOTES ON AN OLD ENGLISH CONFESSIONAL PRAYER IN VESPASIAN D. XX

London, British Library, Cotton Vespasian D. xx (s. x^{med}) contains a number of penitential texts in Latin and, on its last six leaves (fols. 87–92v), a confessional prayer in Old English.¹ This prayer, containing a long list of sins which a penitent could recite during confession, was probably intended as a liturgical text for the administration of penance.² The Old English prayer has been edited twice, by Logeman in 1909 and, partially, by Förster in 1942,³ but has received relatively little scholarly attention. To date, scholars have focused on the prayer's close relation to two other Old English prayers: a shorter version in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius C. i (Sherborne, 1070x1100), fols. 159v–61v, also edited by Logeman,⁴ and another, even shorter version of the prayer in the Old English Handbook for the Use of a Confessor (HfaC).⁵ These three Old English prayers show a great deal of similarity and probably shared a common, Latin original.⁶

In this note, I want to highlight the apparent relation between these three Old English prayers with a Latin prayer in The Book of Cerne, and offer a solution for the manuscript reading ‘omo’ in Vespasian D. xx, which is otherwise unattested in Old English.⁷

I. Relation with The Book of Cerne, prayer 8

Cambridge, University Library, MS L1.1.10 (Mercia, c. 820–40), better known as The Book of Cerne, is a prayer book containing a collection of texts for private devotion and

¹ For this manuscript, see N. R. Ker, Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon (Oxford, 1957), no. 212; H. Gneuss, Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts (Tempe, AZ, 2001), no. 395.

² S. Hamilton, ‘Remedies for ‘Great Transgressions’: Penance and Excommunication in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England, ed. F. Tinti (Woodbridge, 2005), 92.

³ H. Logeman, ‘Anglo-Saxonica Minora, I’, Anglia, 11 (1889), 97–100; M. Förster, ‘Zur Liturgik der angelsächsischen Kirche’, Anglia, 66 (1942), 27–36.

⁴ Logeman, ‘Minora’, 100–3. For the relationship between the two texts, see Förster, ‘Liturgik’, 30–6.

⁵ R. Fowler, ‘A Late Old English Handbook for the Use of a Confessor’, Anglia, 83 (1965), 1–34. See also the latest edition of the Old English HfaC by Allen J. Frantzen, <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/>. Accessed March 2013. For the relationship between the two texts: Förster, ‘Liturgik’, 27–30; K. H. Thomas, The Meaning, Practice and Context of Private Prayer in Late Anglo-Saxon England (Unpublished PhD-thesis, University of York, 2011), 246–7.

⁶ Logeman, ‘Minora’, 100; Förster, ‘Liturgik’, 30.

⁷ I am indebted to the advice and suggestions of Dr Ian McDougall of the Dictionary of Old English (Toronto) and Professor Rolf Bremmer Jr (Leiden University).

meditation. Among its contents are seventy-four Latin prayers, of which many occur in other manuscripts.⁸ Only seven of these prayers are exclusive to The Book of Cerne and one of these is prayer 8, entitled ‘confessio sancti penitentis’.⁹ This prayer shows a number of similarities with the three Old English confessional prayers mentioned above.

For example, prayer 8 and the Old English prayers in *Vespasian D. xx* and *Tiberius C. i* all start with a similar invocation to God, by which the penitent asks God to send ‘true penitence’ into his heart. The Latin text reads:

Domine sancte pater omnipotens aeternae deus – Rogo te Ut mittas in cor meum ueram penitentiam et ueram confessionem omnium peccatorum meorum – Quos ego feci contra tuam uoluntatem et contra animae meae salute – Contra uiros uel mulieres – Uerbis uel operibus – uel cogitationibus. (fol. 46v, ll. 6–10)¹⁰

[O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty and Eternal God. I ask you to send into my heart true penitence and a true confession of all my sins, those which I committed against your will and against my soul’s salvation, against men or women, in words or in deeds or in thoughts.]

The invocation in the opening lines of the prayer in *Vespasian D. xx* is similar to that of prayer 8, but does not mention the specification about sins committed against men or women, in words, deeds or thoughts:

Dryhten þu halga god þu eart ælmihtig 7 ece god Ic forworht 7 synful bidde þæt .
 ðu onsende In me heortan me agol mod gemynd 7 gedefe hreowe 7 soðe ondet .
 nesse ealra minra synna þara þe Ic æfre gefremede wið ðinum willan 7 wið minre sawle þearfe. (ll. 1–5)¹¹

[Lord, you Holy God, you are the Almighty and Eternal God. I, having done wrong and sinful, ask that you send into my heart an earnest mind and fitting penitence and the true confession of all my sins, those which I have ever committed against your will and against my soul’s need.]

The invocation to God in *Tiberius C. i* is closer to the one in The Book of Cerne in that it does include the specification about men, women, words, deeds and thoughts:

⁸ For The Book of Cerne, see: M.P. Brown, The Book of Cerne: Prayer, Patronage and Power in Ninth-Century England (London & Toronto, 1996); for the prayers: *ibid.*, 136–43.

⁹ Frantzen notes that this prayer ‘appears in no other manuscript yet known’. A.J. Frantzen, The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983), 88.

¹⁰ All references to this text are to The Prayer Book of Aedeluald the Bishop, Commonly Called the Book of Cerne, ed. A.B. Kuypers (Cambridge, 1902), 92–5. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹¹ All references to this text are to Logeman, ‘Minora’, 97–100.

Ic bidde ðe min drihten on ðæs acennedan godes naman þæt ðu mid þinre mildheortnysse on me beseoh 7 þæt ðu onsend 7 getryme on mine heortan gedefe hreowe 7 þe anddetnysse eallra minra synna ðæra ðe ic æfre gefremede wið þinne willan 7 wiþ minre sawle þearfe . wið weras . opþe wið wif . opþe wiþ ænine man . wordum opþe weorcum . opþe on geðancum. (ll. 20–6)¹²

[I ask you my Lord, in the name of the incarnate God, that you look down upon me with your mercy and that you send and make strong in my heart fitting penitence and the confession of all my sins, those which I have ever committed against your will and against my soul's need, against men or against women or against any person, with words or deeds or in thoughts]

The prayer in the Old English HfaC differs from the other three prayers and does not have this elaborate invocation to God.¹³

In the table below, I list five further passages showing correspondences between prayer 8 of The Book of Cerne and the Old English prayer in Vespasian D. xx, which appears to be the closest analogue to the Latin text. Each of the passages in the Old English prayer has <495>

(shortened) analogues in Tiberius C. i and some passages are also found in the Old English HfaC.¹⁴

<i>Book of Cerne</i> , prayer 8	Vespasian D. xx
Ego sum confitens omnia genera peccatorum quos diabolus portat animabus ad immunditiam. Confiteor tibi sodomitam fornicationem falsum testimonium adulterium gulam et auaritiam infidelitatem malam pertinaciam fiduciam. ¹⁵ (fol 46v, ll. 15–9, fol. 47r, l. 1)	Ic ondette ealra synna cynn ... ðara þe deofla cyn berað sawlum to besmitenness. Ic eom ondetta sodomiscre synne..., þæt is geligre, leasunga, gitsunga, getreowleasnesse, yfelre recceleasnesse 7 ðristlæcnesse minra synna. ¹⁶ (ll. 14–5, 19–23; cf. Tiberius C. i, ll. 32–4; not in <u>HfaC</u>)
Confiteor tibi quod fui peccatorum operator et peccatorum custus – et peccatis consentiens et peccatorum magister – et peccatorum dux – malam petitionem – Malam uerbositatem et gentilitatem super animositatem et lenocitatem dei praeceptorum – Confiteor tibi omnia crimina	Ic ondette þæt ic wæs synna wyrhta 7 synna gewita, syna latteow 7 lareow 7 geþafa. Ic ondette modes morþor 7 mæne aðas, unsibbe 7 eofulsunge ofermetto 7 unmodennesse 7 receleaste godes beboda. Ic eom ondetta ealra gesewenlicra lusta 7 ungesewenra þara þe ic æfre gefremede on ciricean oððe butan

¹² All references to this text are to Logeman, 'Minora', 101–2, ll. 20–77.

¹³ Cf. Fowler, 'Handbook', 17, l. 35.

¹⁴ For a complete overview of correspondences between these four texts a new comparative edition is needed and I plan to make such an edition in the foreseeable future. All references to the HfaC are to Fowler, 'Handbook', 17–9, ll. 25–81.

¹⁵ 'I am confessing all sorts of sins, those which the Devil carries to the souls resulting in impurity. I confess to you sodomitic fornication, false testimony, adultery, gluttony and avarice, infidelity and wicked obstinacy of faith.'

¹⁶ 'I confess all sorts of sins, ... of those with which the devils' kin carry souls to impurity. I confess sodomitic sins, ... that is adultery, lying, avarice, infidelity, wicked negligence and the boldness of my sins.'

uisibilia concupiscentium et inuisibilia quos umquam feci...in ecclesia uel extra ecclesiam. ¹⁷ (fol 47r, ll. 8–14, 17–8)	ciricean ¹⁸ (ll. 30–6; cf. Tiberius C. i, ll. 37–41; <u>HfaC</u> , ll. 44–7)
[Confiteor] quae accepi in mente uel in ore male uerba malam ferocitatem et mentis lenitatem - Iracundiam inanem pacem potestatis mei uel inpotestatis Cum mea uoluntate uel extra meam uoluntatem quos oculis meis uidi uel auribus audiui uel minimis tetigi uel pedibus ambulaui. ¹⁹ (fol. 47r, ll. 18–9, fol. 47v, ll. 1–4)	Ic eom ondetta þæt ic onfeng on minne muð wealworda 7 yfelre rædnesse unnyttra blissa þara þe ic on minum mode hæbbe minum willan oððe unwillan. ... Ic ondette eall þæt ic æfre to unnytte mid minum eagum gesawe oððe mid minum earum gehyrde oððe muðe gecwæde oððe hondum gefenge oððe fotum geode. ²⁰ (ll. 36–9, 41–4; cf. Tiberius C. i, ll. 41–6; <u>HfaC</u> , 48–50)
pro semini uiri uel mulieris pro omni durum uel molli umido uel arido quodcumque umquam contigisset intus uel foras. ²¹ <496> (fol. 47v, ll. 9–10)	for weres sædes gewilnunga 7 wif manna gemanan 7 for gehwæt heardes oððe hnesces wætes oððe driges þæs <496> ðe me innan oððe utan gebyrede. ²² (ll. 51–4; cf. Tiberius C. i, ll. 48–50; <u>HfaC</u> , ll. 54–5)
pro hoc confiteor uobis quaecumque feci in puerile atate uel in iuuentute uel in senectute – et sepe peccaui in multis rebus multum deum inritaui. ²³ (fol. 47v, ll. 15–7)	Ealra synna Ic eom andetta þara þe ic of cildhade oð þas ieldo þe ic æfter fulwihte agylte 7 on manegum ðingum swiðe gode abeah. ²⁴ (ll. 85–8; Tiberius C. i, ll. 54–7; not in <u>HfaC</u>)

¹⁷ ‘I confess to you that I was a worker of sins and a keeper of sins and agreeing with sins and the master of sins and the leader of sins. [I confess] wicked claim, wicked verbosity, paganism, extreme boldness and carelessness(?) of God’s commands. I confess to you all crimes, visible, coveted and invisible, which I ever committed...inside the church or outside the church.’

¹⁸ ‘I confess that I was a worker of sins and a witness of sins, a leader, a teacher and a consenter of sins. I confess great wickedness of mind and mean oaths, unfriendliness, blasphemy, arrogance and pride and negligence of God’s commands. I confess all visible lusts and the invisible ones, those which I ever did inside the church or outside the church.’

¹⁹ ‘I confess evil words which I received in the mind or in the mouth, wicked defiance and leniency of the mind – [I confess] irritability, empty peace, within my control or outside of my control, out of my free will or outside of my free will, which I saw with my eyes or heard with my ears, or touched with my hands or walked to with my feet.’

²⁰ ‘I confess that I received in my mouth wanton words and evil counsel of useless blessings, which I have in my mind, out of my will or not out of my will. ... I confess all that I ever saw in vain with my eyes, or heard with my ears, or said with my mouth, or fetched with my hands, or went to with my feet.’

²¹ ‘for the seed of a man or of a woman and for everything either hard or soft, wet or dry, with which it ever came into contact, on the inside or the outside.’

²² ‘for the desires of a man’s seed and the intercourse with women, and for anything hard or soft, wet or dry, of that which belongs to me on the inside or the outside.’

²³ ‘I confess to you for that which I committed in the age of childhood or in maturity or in old age – and often sinned and I have greatly angered God in many things.’

²⁴ ‘I confess those [sins] which I committed from childhood to old age, after baptism, and with many things greatly angered God.’

While it is hard to establish a direct textual relationship between the prayer in The Book of Cerne and the three Old English confessional prayers, the four texts show sufficient parallels to assume that they may have sprung from a common, Latin original.

II. A solution for Old English ‘omo’

Another element shared by the Latin prayer in The Book of Cerne and the three Old English prayers is a catalogue of body parts with which sins may have been committed. Such an anatomical catalogue was a common theme in Irish penitential handbooks and prayers, including the so-called lorica.²⁵ Frantzen has called prayer 8 in The Book of Cerne a ‘rather extreme example’ of such a catalogue,²⁶ as it lists no less than fourteen body parts, ranging from kidney to brain, and adds ‘omni durum uel molli umido uel arido ... intus uel foras’ (fol. 47v, ll. 6–10) [everything hard or soft, wet or dry, on the inside or the outside]. The prayer in the HfaC lists twelve body parts and, similarly, includes ‘æghwæt hnesces oððe heardes, wætes oððe driges’ (ll. 50–5) [anything soft or hard, wet or dry]. The prayer in Tiberius C. i is the least exhaustive and mentions only eleven body parts, adding ‘gehwæt ðæs þe me innan oððe utan gebyrede’ (ll. 46–50) [anything with which I am furnished on the inside or the outside]. The prayer in Vespasian D. xx, finally, is even more ‘extreme’ than the other three prayers, as its anatomical catalogue is about twice as long as that in the others. Depending on the interpretation of the word ‘omo’, which is otherwise unattested in Old English, this catalogue enumerates twenty-seven or twenty-eight body parts:²⁷

Ic ondette mine synna for ealne minne lichoman for fell 7 flæsc, fet 7 sconcan, breost 7 ban 7 ba honda, ædra 7 ingehygd, tearas 7 teð 7 feax 7 tungan 7 gristlan 7 goman 7 gurgullione, muð 7 mearh 7 modgeponc, sionwe 7 sidan 7 swyran, mid eagan 7 earan 7 ealle omo welere 7 word 7 gewitlocan for weres sædes gewilnunga 7 wif manna gemanan 7 for gehwæt heardes oððe hnesces wætes oððe driges þæs ðe me innan oððe utan gebyrede. (ll. 46–54)

While Logeman did not comment on the word ‘omo’, Förster mentioned that the manuscript reading here must be ‘verderbt’ [corrupt] and suggested that the scribe may have meant ‘ealle mine welere’ [all my lips]. He supported this rather far-reaching emendation by noting that a Mercian fem. acc. plural ‘welere’ is attested alongside West-Saxon masc. acc. plural ‘weleras’. Nevertheless, a phrase like ‘ealle mine welere’ [all my lips] is somewhat

²⁵ G. Wainwright and K. B. Westerfield Tucker, The Oxford History of Christian Worship (Oxford, 2006), 191.

²⁶ Frantzen, Literature of Penance, 86.

²⁷ Interestingly, it is the alliteration rather than the geography of the body that determines the order of the catalogue.

unsatisfactory, as one would expect something like ‘both my lips’. Förster himself was not completely convinced of his emendation either and suggested that, alternatively, the Anglo-Saxon scribe may have left ‘etwas’ [something] out, because ‘omo’ is the last word on fol. 89v.²⁸ Förster did not give any suggestion as to what this ‘something’ may have been.

<497>

A possible emendation for the phrase ‘ealle omo’ in this passage could be ‘ealle leomo’, caused by a simple haplology of ‘le’.²⁹ ‘Leomo’ is a back mutated form of limu ‘limbs’ and is found in, for example, the Old English Bede: ‘7 ða cyste bufan gesetton, in ða hie gestaðeledon þa ungebrosendlican leomo þæs ilcan fæder’ [and they placed the coffin above it <the tomb of Cuthbert>, in which they had deposited the undecaying limbs of this father].³⁰ Reading ‘omo’ as ‘leomo’ would render the passage in Vespasian D. xx: ‘mid eagan 7 earan 7 ealle leomo, welere 7 word’ [with eyes and ears and all limbs, lips and words], which is grammatically unproblematic.

In favour of the emendation of ‘leomo’ for ‘omo’ is the fact that the phrase ‘eyes, ears and all limbs’ has near-analogues in both Old English and Latin. One of these near-analogues is found in a so-called Sunday Letter, a document supposedly written by Christ and urging its readers strictly to observe Sunday. In this letter, Christ warns his readers that if they do not follow his commandment: ‘ic sende ofer eow geswinc and mettrumnesse on andwlitan and on eagam and on earum and on eallum limum, þa eow habbað oð deaðes tocyme swiðe hearde’ [I shall send over you affliction and sickness – on the face and in the eyes and in the ears and in all limbs – which will afflict you very severely until the arrival of death].³¹ A closely related, Latin version of this Sunday letter has a similar phrase: ‘in faciem, in oculos, in os, in aures, in nares et in omnia membra’ (on the face, in the eyes, in the mouth, in the ears, in the nostrils and in all limbs).³² Phrases close to ‘eyes, ears and all limbs’ are also found in Latin works by the church fathers St Jerome and St Augustine.³³ In general, references to eyes, ears and limbs

²⁸ Förster, ‘Liturgik’, 29, n. 2.

²⁹ I owe this solution to a suggestion by Ian McDougall.

³⁰ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, IV, ch. 31. *Old English Version of Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. T. Miller, EETS o.s. 95, 96 (London, 1890–1) II, 378–9. ll. 4–5.

³¹ D. Haines, *Sunday Observance and the Sunday Letter in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2010), 122–3, ll. 88–90. Haines translates the phrase ‘þa eow habbað oð deaðes tocyme swiðe hearde’, mistakenly, as ‘which you will have very severely until the approach of death’. In Haines’s edition, this letter is called Letter B; the text was previously edited as sermon XLV in *Wulfstan. Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*, ed. A. Napier (Berlin 1883), 226–32.

³² Haines, *Sunday*, 203, ll. 63–4. Reprinted from R. Priebsch, ‘The Chief Sources of Some Anglo-Saxon Homilies’, *Otia Merseiana*, 1 (1899), 129–47. This Latin version is found in Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 1355, fols. 89r–90v.

³³ Augustine, *Sermones ad populum*, sermon 53, ch. 15: ‘Redi ergo mecum ad faciem cordis: ipsam praepara. Intus est cui loquitur Deus. Aures, oculi, caetera membra visibilia, interioris cuiusdam vel habitaculum vel

may be said to represent all three ‘zones of interacting with persons and things in the human environment’, as identified by Bruce J. Malina: the zone of emotion-fused thought (represented by the eyes), the zone of self-expressive speech (the ears) and the zone of purposeful action (the limbs).³⁴

If we accept the emendation of ‘leomo’ for ‘omo’, the passage in Vespasian D. xx translates as follows:

I confess my sins for my entire body, for skin and flesh, feet and shins, breast and bone and both hands, veins and mind, tears and teeth and hair and tongue and gristles and palate and throat, mouth and marrow and mind, sinews and sides and the neck, with eyes and ears and all limbs, lips and words and mind, for the desires of a man’s seed and the fellowship of men and women, and for anything hard or soft, wet or dry, with which I am furnished on the inside or the outside.

As such, this passage numbers no fewer than twenty-eight body parts³⁵ and covers sins committed by virtually every part of the human

<498>

body, including its eyes, ears and, crucially, all limbs.

THIJS PORCK

Leiden University

organum sunt’, *PL* 38, col. 371; Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam prophetam*, XVIII, ch. 6: ‘Furorem autem, obliuionem, iram, paenitudinem, ita in deo debemus accipere, quomodo pedes, manus, oculos, aures, et cetera membra, quae habere dicitur incorporalis et inuisibilis deus’, *Commentaires de Jerome sur le prophete Isaie, Livres XVI-XVIII*, ed. R. Gryson (Freiburg, 1999), 1832–3.

³⁴ B. J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY, 2001), 68–75. Cf. P. Sims-Williams, ‘Thought, Word and Deed: An Irish Triad’, *Ériu*, 29 (1978), 78–111.

³⁵ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, 89 notes that the catalogue in a confessional prayer attributed to Alcuin, which lists twenty-three body parts, is ‘longer than that found in any other confessional prayer’.